



**World Health Organization
Organisation mondiale de la Santé**

FIFTIETH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

Provisional agenda item 27.2

A50/17
12 March 1997

Environmental matters

Report by the Director-General

This document covers three separate subjects: the forthcoming special session of the United Nations General Assembly to review the situation five years after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development; promotion of chemical safety with special attention to persistent organic pollutants; and protection of the marine environment.

Since the United Nations General Assembly decided in resolution 50/113 to convene at the highest possible level of participation a special session (New York, 23-27 June 1997) for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, part I provides information on WHO's follow-up as "task manager for health" on the agreements reached at UNCED, and action to ensure that progress in the health aspects will be assessed at the special session and kept well to the fore in the programme of work of the intergovernmental Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD).

Part II concerns persistent organic pollutants (POPs). Decision 18/32 adopted by the UNEP Governing Council at its eighteenth session in May 1995 invited the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals, with the ILO/WHO/UNEP International Programme on Chemical Safety and the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS), to initiate an assessment of POPs, starting with a list of 12 substances that includes DDT. It further invited IFCS to develop "recommendations and information on international action, including such information as would be needed for a possible decision regarding an appropriate international legal mechanism on persistent organic pollutants, to be considered by the Governing Council and the World Health Assembly no later than in 1997". This report provides brief background information, outlines the pertinent issues and presents the specific recommendations of IFCS to the UNEP Governing Council and the Health Assembly.

During the ninety-ninth session of the Executive Board, United Nations General Assembly resolution 51/189 on the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities was evoked. The resolution requests the international organizations concerned to provide support in the implementation of the Global Programme of Action. It also calls upon States to take action in the governing bodies of the relevant agencies to ensure that the requisite support is provided. The Executive Board decided to place the matter on the agenda of the Fiftieth World Health Assembly. Part III of this report provides brief background information on the programme, the institutional arrangements that have been established so far, and the implications for WHO.

In part IV the Health Assembly is invited to consider resolutions on promotion of chemical safety with special attention to persistent organic pollutants and on protection of the marine environment.

CONTENTS

	Page
I. Special session of the United Nations General Assembly: five years after the Rio Conference (UNCED)	3
II. Promotion of chemical safety with special attention to persistent organic pollutants	6
III. Protection of the marine environment	10
IV. Matters for the particular attention of the Health Assembly	12
Annex. Recommendations of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety to the UNEP Governing Council and to the World Health Assembly	

I. SPECIAL SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY:¹ FIVE YEARS AFTER THE RIO CONFERENCE (UNCED) - WHO'S ROLE AS "TASK MANAGER FOR HEALTH"

INTRODUCTION

1. The concept of "human-centered" sustainable development has emerged in response to growing awareness that current patterns of growth and natural-resource use are threatening local and global equilibrium and the health and well-being of humankind. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, adopted Agenda 21 which sets out what the world community should do to achieve sustainable development.
2. International commitment to achieving sustainable development has been further strengthened by the outcomes of the major world conferences organized by the United Nations in the 1990s.² They have served to focus attention on the human dimension of sustainable development, in particular on the overwhelming priority of equitable human development through poverty alleviation, capacity-building, and improving the status and role of women.
3. A special session of the United Nations General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 will be held in New York, five years after Rio, from 23 to 27 June 1997, as envisaged in Chapter 38 of Agenda 21.

WHO'S ROLE AS "TASK MANAGER FOR HEALTH"

4. WHO was designated task manager for health by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in 1993; it is responsible for ensuring collaboration among the competent organizations of the United Nations system, and is expected to initiate and play a catalytic function in joint activities and programmes, to develop common strategies for implementation of Agenda 21 in the United Nations system with respect to health, to determine policies and further action required, and to report on progress.
5. The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was established by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in February 1993 to monitor the implementation of Agenda 21 and to reinforce those intergovernmental decision-making processes that integrate environmental and development concerns. The Commission's programme of work set the subject of human health for its second session in May 1994; WHO, as task manager, coordinated the preparation of documents for this session. Its report to the Commission showed how health affects or is affected by all the other factors that are the subject of Agenda 21. The report establishes four lines of reform for governments to pursue in order to bring health into their national plans for sustainable development: the community, the health services, other sectors, and national decision-making.
6. The five-year plan of work adopted by the Commission will culminate in a special session of the United Nations General Assembly in June 1997 for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21.

¹ As decided by resolution 50/113 of the United Nations General Assembly.

² The World Summit for Children, the World Conference on Education for All, the World Conference on Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development, the World Conference on the Prevention of Natural Disasters, the Fourth World Conference on Women, and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements.

WHO has initiated steps to ensure that this review gives due attention to health as central to sustainable development.

7. A progress report has been prepared for the Secretary-General¹ by WHO as task manager. The Secretary-General's report takes into account the decisions taken by the Commission on Sustainable Development on this subject in 1994 at its second session.

INCORPORATING HEALTH IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PLANS

8. As indicated above, WHO's role as task manager involves the ensuring of collaboration in activities and programmes based on common policies and strategies for the United Nations system, at national, regional and global levels. The Secretary-General's report contains chapters on progress made, "promising changes", unfulfilled expectations and emerging priorities.

9. Among promising changes, a major outcome of UNCED has been the agreement that countries should prepare and implement national plans for sustainable development. This presents a challenge and an opportunity for the health and environment sectors and others whose activities affect health to ensure that related considerations are adequately dealt with. WHO has taken a number of initiatives in cooperation with other international organizations to assist in this process, including a major interregional initiative, implemented jointly with UNDP, to promote the incorporation of aspects affecting health and the environment in the preparation of national plans for sustainable development.

10. The interregional initiative was started in 1993 with promotion and support activities in six countries. WHO, in cooperation with UNDP, provided financial and technical support to these countries in the planning process for sustainable development, with the aim of promoting intersectoral cooperation, revising plans to incorporate more fully aspects affecting health and the environment, and in some cases developing specific national plans on health and the environment. The overall aim of the initiative is to strengthen the role of the health sector in related aspects of national development planning.

11. The progress achieved so far has been promising. The interregional initiative has served to increase awareness of issues affecting health and the environment, has strengthened the role of the health sector in development planning, and has resulted in the preparation and adoption of firm plans for related action. By the end of 1996 the initiative included 16 countries, and it is planned to expand it by another two to four countries during 1997. Guidelines based on experience gained, entitled "The health route to a sustainable world - health, environment and sustainable development" was prepared and issued in early 1996;² the involvement of WHO and UNDP is not limited to the preparation of plans, which provide a basis for future technical cooperation; the initiative also promotes the participation of other international organizations concerned.

12. Regional conferences have brought together ministers of health and the environment, and have led to further commitment to attaining long-term policy objectives on environment and health. The second European Conference on Environment and Health, which was held in Helsinki in 1994, developed a framework for environmental health action in Europe including a guide for the development of national plans of action. The target date for establishing these action plans is 1997.

13. The Pan American Conference on Health and Environment in Sustainable Human Development was organized by PAHO in October 1995. It adopted the Pan American Charter on Health and Environment in

¹ Overall progress achieved since UNCED. Report of the Secretary-General. Addendum. Protecting and promoting human health (Chapter 6 of Agenda 21), document E/CN.17/1997/2/Add.5 (available on request).

² Document WHO/EOS/95.21.

Sustainable Human Development and a Regional Work Plan. Another outcome has been the proposed development of a Regional Plan for Investment in the Environment and Health (PIAS) which determines the investment in the Region over the next 12 years needed to overcome deficiencies in the health services infrastructure, drinking-water supply and basic sanitation.

14. The second Conference on Health, Environment and Development of the Eastern Mediterranean Region, held in November 1995, adopted the Beirut Declaration on Action for a Healthy Environment, in which countries pledged, *inter alia*, to prepare their action plans for health and environment as part of their sustainable development plan no later than 1999.

SPECIAL SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY (NEW YORK, 23-27 JUNE 1997)

15. There is broad consensus that the special session should not attempt to renegotiate Agenda 21 but should concentrate on its further implementation. It is expected that the special session will be attended by Heads of State or Government. Its major objectives are:

- (a) to revitalize and energize commitment to the concept of sustainable development;
- (b) frankly to recognize failures to meet certain goals and identify reasons for failure;
- (c) to define priorities for the period beyond 1997;
- (d) to consider matters that have not been sufficiently dealt with by UNCED.

16. It is expected that the final outcome of the special session will be a political declaration of the Heads of State or Government on further action on institutional, financial and programme matters.

17. As a member of the Interagency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) established in 1992 to advise ACC on follow-up of UNCED, WHO has continuously been involved in furthering the part of health in action related to sustainable development. The past four sessions of the Intergovernmental Commission on Sustainable Development have contributed to recognizing the importance of health as a subject affecting many others and as being central to sustainable development, and it has been kept on the programme of work of the Commission, which, despite frequent calls for broader representation of different government sectors including finance and health, has remained dominated primarily by the environmental sector.

18. In order to keep health in the forefront of attention, WHO will produce a comprehensive report for the special session entitled: "Health and environment in sustainable development: five years after the Earth Summit". This report will demonstrate that a good environment is crucial for human health, describing the adverse health effects of environmental hazards, and showing, conversely, how a sound environment can support or promote health. In showing trends and presenting projections it will draw attention to newly emerging environmental health problems and indicate the types of action required to improve environmental health management.

19. The Director-General's Council on the Earth Summit Action Programme for Health and Environment has recommended that a high-level panel be convened in conjunction with the special session of the United Nations General Assembly. Its objectives would be:

- (1) to review the status of major environmental determinants of health, taking into account the findings of the above-mentioned report;

(2) to review progress in linking matters related to health and the environment and economic development at different levels;

(3) to determine how specific health and health-related aspects can best be incorporated in the future programme of work of CSD.

20. The panel will have four or five members representing political, sectoral and scientific domains and will link the follow-up to the Rio Conference with WHO's renewed strategy for health for all, particularly as it relates to intersectoral action for health. The panel is expected to meet in New York on 26 June 1997.

21. Consultation on the renewal of the health-for-all policy involving Member States and other partners in health development offers a strategic opportunity to ensure that progress achieved in implementing Agenda 21 is brought to the attention of all those involved so that its policy implications will be fully reflected in the renewed health-for-all strategy.

II. PROMOTION OF CHEMICAL SAFETY WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO PERSISTENT ORGANIC POLLUTANTS

INTRODUCTION

22. Persistent organic pollutants (POPs) are organic compounds that resist photolytic, chemical and biological degradation. They are characterized by high lipid solubility, resulting in accumulation in fatty tissues of living organisms. POPs pose a risk of adverse effects on human health and the environment. It is widely accepted that the use of such substances cannot be considered sustainable. With the evidence of long-range transport, in the environment (air, water), of these substances and the consequent threats to the whole globe, the international community has on several occasions called for urgent global action to reduce and eliminate emissions and releases of these chemicals.

BACKGROUND

23. Decision 18/32 on POPs, adopted at the eighteenth session of the UNEP Governing Council in May 1995, invited the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC), working with the International Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS) and the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS), to initiate an expeditious assessment with 12 POPs (polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), dioxins, furans, aldrin, dieldrin, DDT, endrin, chlordane, hexachlorobenzene (HCB), mirex, toxaphene and heptachlor). It further invited IFCS to develop "recommendations and information on international action, including such information as would be needed for a possible decision regarding an appropriate international legal mechanism on persistent organic pollutants, to be considered by the Governing Council and the World Health Assembly no later than in 1997".

24. Existing knowledge on the chemistry and toxicology of the 12 substances was consolidated through IPCS in a report submitted as an information document to IFCS and the Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt a Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, organized by UNEP in Washington, D.C. from 23 October to 3 November 1995. Both bodies concluded that the available scientific evidence was sufficient to demonstrate the need for international action on the specified substances. In the Declaration of the Washington Conference, governments agreed to act to develop a global

legally binding instrument for the reduction and/or elimination of emissions, discharges and, where appropriate, elimination of the manufacture and use of the POPs identified in UNEP's Governing Council decision 18/32.

25. In addition, the Executive Body for the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution of ECE agreed at its thirteenth session that negotiations for a protocol on POPs could be initiated and gave the Working Group on Strategies the mandate to initiate negotiations with a proposed deadline of 1997.

26. In response to the invitation in UNEP's Governing Council decision 18/32, IFCS convened an experts' meeting¹ to complete the requisite assessment process and established an ad hoc working group on POPs to make recommendations for international action. This report presents the outcome of the work of the IFCS working group, which met in an open forum in which representatives from 32 countries, seven nongovernmental organizations and seven intergovernmental organizations participated.

27. To improve access to information on POPs, UNEP has established a clearing-house for such information.²

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF IFCS

28. The Annex to this report contains specific recommendations of IFCS to the UNEP Governing Council and the Health Assembly concerning international actions. The Health Assembly is invited to consider the matter and in particular the proposed process.

29. The following are a number of relevant key points from the deliberations and conclusions of the IFCS:³

- IFCS concluded that international action, including a global legally binding instrument, is required to reduce the risks to human health and the environment arising from the release of the 12 specified POPs and that coordination of regional and international initiatives on POPs is essential to ensure harmonized environmental and health effects from mutually supportive and effective programmes that result in the development of policies with complementary and agreed objectives.
- IFCS concluded that, based on available information:
 - (a) aldrin, dieldrin, endrin, and toxaphene are no longer produced, mirex and hexachlorobenzene (HCB) appear to be out of production (see (d) below), and efforts to gain more information on production and use are not warranted;
 - (b) DDT is still produced for disease vector control, although it is misused for other purposes;
 - (c) chlordane and heptachlor are still produced for ant and termite control; and
 - (d) polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and HCB are not currently manufactured but are produced as unintended by-products.

¹ Persistent Organic Pollutants: Considerations for Global Action, IFCS Experts' Meeting on POPs, Final Report, 17-19 June 1996, Manila, Philippines (IFCS/EXP.POPs/Report.1, 20 June 1996); available (in English, French and Spanish) on request.

² In response to the resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly as recommended by the Economic and Social Council in the Second Committee during the fifty-first session (document A/C.2/51/L.2, para. 9(b)).

³ IFCS Ad Hoc Working Group on Persistent Organic Pollutants Meeting, Final Report, 21-22 June 1996, Manila, Philippines (IFCS/WG.POPs/Report.1, 1 July 1996); full report is available (in English, French and Spanish) on request.

- IFCS concluded that there are alternatives (possibly including indigenous methods) for all the pesticide POPs, although at present the applicability of these alternatives for some uses may be limited in some parts of the world or in some situations. IFCS recommended that the availability of information and expertise on alternatives to POPs should be improved through information exchange and education programmes.
- IFCS recommended that guidance on the selection of replacements for POPs pesticides should be developed; the guidance should cover non-chemical as well as chemical alternatives and include advice on the factors to be considered in choosing alternatives and sources of information. A proposed alternative should be considered inappropriate by national or regional governments if national or regional conditions make it unlikely that the alternative can be managed in ways that avoid significant injury to workers, local communities or the environment.
- IFCS concluded that efforts should be taken to reduce the reliance on DDT for vector control and should be directed to making viable alternatives readily available in order to phase out the use of DDT. However, DDT should only be used in the context of a fully integrated approach for vector control (e.g., incorporating sanitation, public health programmes, environmental management, etc.) and in accordance with related WHO guidelines.

30. Among the 12 POPs under initial consideration, DDT is the only insecticide still in use for public health purposes. A WHO Study Group on Vector Control for Malaria and Other Mosquito-borne Diseases (1993) compared the risks and benefits of using DDT in vector control; the conclusions were presented to the Executive Board.¹ DDT is only recommended for possible use in indoor residual spraying for malaria and leishmaniasis control, under the conditions specified in Annex 1 to the report of the study group.

31. At the IFCS experts' meeting (see paragraph 26 above), some participants suggested that WHO with the support of FAO should develop a programme of research on viable alternatives to DDT for the control of malaria and other vectorborne diseases. This should include integrated pest management (IPM) approaches, biological control and technology transfer. The nineteenth session of the UNEP Governing Council (27 January - 7 February 1997) endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of IFCS and requested the Executive Director to prepare for and convene, together with WHO and other international organizations concerned, an intergovernmental negotiating committee, with a mandate to prepare a legally binding international instrument for implementing international action on POPs.

SPECIFIC PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUES CONCERNING DISEASE VECTOR CONTROL

32. The use of DDT in public health programmes, and malaria control in particular, has been the subject of much controversy for many years. The impact of DDT on the environment has been greatly reduced since its use in agriculture was banned in most countries. However, its misuse continues and more stringent measures to prevent its illegal use in agriculture are needed. Countries continuing to use DDT should ensure that the pesticide is not diverted for unauthorized uses. To this end consideration may be given to restricting DDT to government-controlled programmes.

33. The implementation of the global malaria control strategy envisages the selective, integrated use of the available vector control methods, taking into consideration technical and operational feasibility, resources and infrastructures. The available vector control methods are based on environmental management, biological control, and the use of chemicals. With rare exceptions, environmental management and biological control have limited applicability on their own. Chemicals may be used for indoor residual spraying, larviciding, or in the

¹ See WHO Technical Report Series, 1995, No. 857, Annex 1; and document EB97/1996/REC/2, pages 135 and 136.

impregnation of bednets and other material used in malaria prevention and control, and their use is the most important option for controlling epidemics.

34. Properly managed, indoor residual spraying with DDT should contribute minimally to environmental contamination. DDT made a major contribution to the eradication or virtual eradication of malaria from a number of countries and remains a most valuable tool. Its use has, however, declined owing to vector resistance, reduction in global production and adverse publicity.

35. WHO has been encouraging the development and evaluation of new classes of insecticides through the WHO pesticide evaluation scheme. Criteria for selecting substitutes include efficacy, resistance and cross-resistance of target insects to conventional insecticides, cost, feasibility for use in tropical climates, human health effects, environmental degradability and effects, and hazards associated with use. Unfortunately the development of new pesticides is much slower than insect resistance development. More acutely toxic chemicals have been introduced in the past for vector control leading to an increase in acute poisonings, both accidental and occupational. Resistance to them has developed in a number of malaria vectors. In more recent years pyrethroids have started to replace these compounds; however, there is evidence that resistance to this group of chemicals is increasing. Such cases of resistance are usually attributed to the extensive use of insecticides in agriculture. Close collaboration between ministries of health and agriculture in planning the use of insecticides and in resistance management is therefore emphasized.

36. It may be noted that the greatest part of human exposure to the listed POPs is attributed to the food chain and does not appear to represent a significant public health concern; only in selected populations of chemical workers does occupational exposure prevail.

37. Vectorborne diseases are major threats to human health and social and economic development, malaria being one of the most significant. The options for malaria control are limited. Vaccines for operational use are not yet available and are unlikely to be in the immediate future. The limited antimalarial drugs are primarily for curative purposes, their role in preventive prophylaxis being restricted. Use of any insecticide, including DDT, should be minimized through the promotion of selective, site-specific and integrated use of vector control measures. The option of DDT use in indoor residual spraying for malaria and leishmaniasis vector control must, however, remain open until adequate and suitable alternatives are available. The availability of such alternatives to DDT remain limited and are not as numerous as is often stated; data on their comparative advantages are needed. With respect to the use of indigenous medicinal plants, WHO's position is that currently there are no available alternatives that are operationally feasible.

38. Experience cautions against too heavy reliance on a single method or approach, because no single one is applicable in the diverse malaria epidemiological situations encountered even within the same country and, even where a method or approach is applicable, operational and/or technical aspects can sooner or later affect their utility. Overall experience has also demonstrated that long-term large-scale use of insecticides, including use for indoor residual spraying, is not sustainable, owing to operational and financial constraints and vector resistance. Selective, highly-focused or targeted use of insecticides in a well defined time-frame is thus strongly recommended under the global malaria control strategy.

III. PROTECTION OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION

39. In December 1996, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 51/189 on the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities. It calls upon States to take action in the governing bodies of the agencies concerned to ensure that they contribute in the areas covered by their mandate and, more specifically, that they take the lead in coordinating the development of a clearing-house mechanism. The resolution also names WHO as the lead agency for the development of the clearing-house mechanism where information on sewage is concerned.

40. The international efforts to protect the marine environment are of various types of direct relevance to the Organization. The health of coastal populations depends largely on the integrity of coastal ecological systems, which are threatened by a variety of human activities including recreational activities, particularly through disposal of harmful substances from land-based sources, also contaminating seafood, for example. Numerous epidemics linked to the discharge of insufficiently treated sewage into coastal waters have been reported. Of particular concern are the conditions in small island developing States, as emphasized in the 1994 Conference in Barbados.¹

41. The protection of oceans, seas and coastal areas and the protection and use of living resources is the subject of Chapter 17 of Agenda 21, as adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992). This was followed by the Intergovernmental Conference to adopt a Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities which was held in Washington, D.C., from 23 October to 3 November 1995. At its closing session the Washington Declaration on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities was adopted,² expressing the commitment of States to the Programme.

GLOBAL PROGRAMME OF ACTION

42. The Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities³ was developed to combat the progressing degradation of the marine environment. It calls on States to develop or strengthen their programmes for improving coastal management within a few years, including the reduction of emissions polluting the sea. It calls on UNEP to promote and facilitate, in partnership with other organizations, the implementation of the Programme of Action at the national and international level. The Global Programme of Action identifies priority areas, sets objectives, proposes activities which Member States should undertake and identifies the needs for international cooperation and support. This cooperation should provide support in capacity-building, mobilizing of resources for countries in need of assistance, and other specific fields such as monitoring progress and tackling major problems in a global way. Each agency should take action in its domain of expertise, in close partnership with UNEP.

43. The establishment and operation of a clearing-house is an essential part of the Global Programme of Action - a referral system through which decision-makers at the national and regional level are given access to information, practical experience and scientific and technical expertise for the development and implementation of strategies to deal with the effects of land-based activities. The responsibility for establishing and operating

¹ See United Nations. Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, Barbados, 25 April - 6 May 1994.

² Document UNEP/(OCA)/LBA/IG.2/6, 5 December 1995, Annex II.

³ Document UNEP/(OCA)/LBA/IG.2/7, 5 December 1995.

this mechanism would be shared by a number of agencies (IAEA, FAO, IMO, UNEP and WHO), each agency being responsible for information on a given category of pollution source. In view of its extensive expertise in the area, WHO has been identified as the Organization responsible for information on sewage (see paragraph 45).

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION

44. Institutional arrangements for the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities were outlined in United Nations General Assembly resolution 51/189, adopted in December 1996. The resolution stresses "the need for States to take action for the formal endorsement by each competent international organization of those parts of the Global Programme of Action that are relevant to their mandates and to accord appropriate priority to the implementation of the Global Programme of Action in the work programme of each organization", as well as "the need for States to take such action at the next meeting of the governing bodies of the United Nations Environment Programme, ..., the World Health Organization, ..., as well as in other competent international and regional organizations within and outside the United Nations system".

45. By the same General Assembly resolution UNEP was called upon "within its available resources, and with the aid of voluntary contributions from States for this purpose, to take expeditious action to provide for the establishment and implementation of the clearing-house mechanism referred to in the Global Programme of Action". The resolution also calls upon States, in relation to the clearing-house mechanism, to take action in the governing bodies of the intergovernmental organizations and programmes concerned to ensure that these organizations and programmes take the lead in coordinating the development of the clearing-house mechanism with respect to various source categories, identifying WHO as the lead organization for information on sewage.

IMPLICATIONS FOR WHO

46. International efforts to assess and control marine pollution and its effects on human health, particularly due to seafood contamination and polluted recreational waters, have been actively supported by the Organization through its environmental health programme for many decades; support to the implementation of the Global Programme is therefore considered a logical continuation of its work.

47. The specific clearing-house task relating to information on sewage has been allocated to WHO in the light of its substantive programme on community water supply and sanitation and on water pollution control. Indeed, sewerage is a high priority not only for marine environmental protection but also for the protection of drinking-water and for tackling sanitation problems, particularly in view of the current situation in cities of developing countries, which could substantially benefit from capacity-building efforts. The expertise on the subject, as well as on the use of modern information exchange technology, is available within WHO's environmental health programme.

48. The technical challenge can be met, but not with the financial and manpower resources currently at WHO's disposal. The clearing-house task is estimated to require at least one person-year and an operational budget of US\$ 50 000, neither of which is available; voluntary contributions from Member States, as indicated in the General Assembly resolution, are necessary. Subsequent operation, maintenance and revision would require about one third of these resources on an annual basis.

IV. MATTERS FOR THE PARTICULAR ATTENTION OF THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY

49. The Health Assembly is invited:

to take note of the importance of the special session of the United Nations General Assembly for the future work of the Organization in health and the environment in "human-centered" sustainable development; and

to encourage those working in the health sector to become fully involved in the follow-up of the agreements reached at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and other global United Nations conferences.

50. The Health Assembly is further invited to consider the resolution recommended by the Executive Board in its resolution EB99.R25 on promotion of chemical safety with special attention to persistent organic pollutants, and the following resolution on protection of the marine environment:

The Fiftieth World Health Assembly,

Noting the successful conclusion of the Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt a Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, which was held in Washington, D.C., from 23 October to 3 November 1995;

Having considered United Nations General Assembly resolution 51/189 on institutional arrangements for the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities;

Stressing the need for Member States to take the necessary measures for the implementation of the Global Programme of Action at national and, as appropriate, regional and international levels;

Concerned about risks to human health from the degradation of the marine environment caused by land-based sources of pollution,

1. ENDORSES the Washington Declaration on Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities and the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities as they relate to the protection of human health;

2. URGES Member States:

(1) to support the implementation of the Global Programme of Action in general and with regard to public health aspects;

(2) to participate in the development of a clearing-house for the implementation of the Global Programme of Action and in particular to support WHO's efforts to lead the development of the clearing-house mechanism for information on sewage;

(3) to explore ways and means of making additional financial resources available for setting up and maintaining the clearing-house mechanism;

3. REQUESTS the Director-General:

- (1) to seek extrabudgetary financial resources in order to enable the Organization to discharge its assigned responsibilities in the implementation of the Global Programme of Action;
- (2) to the extent that resources permit, to take the lead in the development of a clearing-house mechanism for information on sewage as one of the major land-based sources of pollution of the marine environment;
- (3) to support the implementation of the Global Programme of Action concerning matters related to environmental health;
- (4) to collaborate with UNEP and other international organizations concerned in the implementation of the Global Programme of Action.

ANNEX

**RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL FORUM
ON CHEMICAL SAFETY TO THE UNEP GOVERNING COUNCIL
AND TO THE WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY¹**

50. Based on the information assessed in implementing UNEP GC Decision 18/32, and the conclusions and recommendations included in this report, the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS) recommends to the UNEP Governing Council (GC) and the World Health Assembly (WHA) that:
51. UNEP GC and WHA **decide** that immediate international action should be initiated to protect human health and the environment through measures which will reduce and/or eliminate (as further elaborated in paragraphs 46, 47, 48) the emissions and discharges of the 12 POPs specified in UNEP GC Decision 18/32 and, where appropriate, eliminate production and subsequently the remaining use of those POPs that are intentionally produced.
52. UNEP GC and WHA **recognize** that in order to protect human health and the environment, such international action should include:
- (a) use of separate differentiated approaches to take action on pesticides, industrial chemicals, and unintentionally produced by-products and contaminants;
 - (b) use of transition periods, with phased implementation for various proposed actions;
 - (c) careful and efficient management of existing stocks of the specified POPs and, where necessary and feasible, their elimination;
 - (d) training in enforcement and monitoring of use to discourage the misuse of POPs pesticides; and
 - (e) remediation of contaminated sites and environmental reservoirs, where feasible and practicable.
53. UNEP GC and WHA **recognize** that international action should incorporate such practical measures as:
- (a) the expeditious development of a global, legally binding instrument. The instrument should be developed in such a manner as to recognize ongoing activities on POPs and other related issues and institutions, as well as differing

¹ IFCS Ad Hoc Working Group on Persistent Organic Pollutants Meeting, Final Report, 21-22 June 1996, Manila, Philippines (Section 5; IFCS/WG.POPs/Report.1, 1 July 1996); full report is available (in English, French and Spanish) on request.

regional and national conditions and taking into account the special concerns of developing countries and countries with economies in transition. In addition, provision should be made for commitments at a national and regional level allowing for a higher level of protection than that afforded through the global instrument.

(b) voluntary measures, which may be implemented as a complement to, or independently of, a legally binding instrument;

(c) action at the national, regional and global levels, reflecting possible needs for different regional and sub-regional approaches and the need to find, at the national level, the most effective and appropriate mix of policy instruments and measures to implement agreed international commitments;

(d) consideration of unique customs codes for POPs chemicals, and labelling in compliance with guidelines under the FAO Code of Conduct;

(e) coordination among different regional and international initiatives on POPs to ensure harmonized environmental and health outcomes from mutually supportive and effective programs that result in the development of policies with complementary, and non-conflicting, objectives and that avoid overlap and duplication with other international and regional conventions and programmes; and

(f) input of scientific, technical and economic expertise and consideration of the ability of existing institutions and organisations to provide this input.

54. UNEP GC and WHA **note** that socio-economic factors should be addressed in developing and implementing international action including the following:

(a) possible impacts on food production;

(b) possible impacts on human health (e.g. for vector control agents);

(c) need for capacity building in countries and regions;

(d) financing concerns and opportunities; and

(e) possible trade impacts.

55. UNEP GC **invite** UNEP to prepare for and convene, together with other relevant international organisations, an intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC), with a mandate to prepare an international legally binding instrument for implementing international action initially beginning with the 12 specified POPs. Participation in the INC should be open to governments and relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations consistent with UN applicable rules.

56. UNEP GC and WHA **note** the need to develop science-based criteria and a procedure for identifying additional POPs as candidates for future international action and **recommend** that the proposed INC be directed to establish, at its

first meeting, an expert group to carry out this work. The group should work expeditiously, proceeding concurrently with the INC process, in order to develop criteria for consideration by the INC in the negotiation of a legally binding instrument. The process should incorporate criteria pertaining to persistence, bioaccumulation, toxicity and exposure in different regions, and should take into account dispersion mechanisms for the atmosphere and the hydrosphere, migratory species and the need to reflect possible influences of marine transport and tropical climates.

57. UNEP GC recommend that the INC, in undertaking its work, take into account the conclusions and recommendations of the IFCS *ad hoc* Working Group on POPs.

= = =